

# Report

# Point Reyes National Seashore

## ■ 1.0 Site Description

Situated in Marin County, Point Reyes National Seashore is located approximately 30 miles northwest of San Francisco. By road, this puts it within two hour's driving distance of the greater San Francisco Bay Area population.

Figure 1 shows the Point Reyes National Seashore Park features and their relationship to the highways reference above.

Point Reyes is a National Seashore and was authorized to become a unit of the NPS on September 13, 1962. The seashore was formally established on October 20, 1972. Wilderness areas within the Park were designated on October 18, 1976. In 1988, Point Reyes National Seashore was designated a Biosphere Reserve.

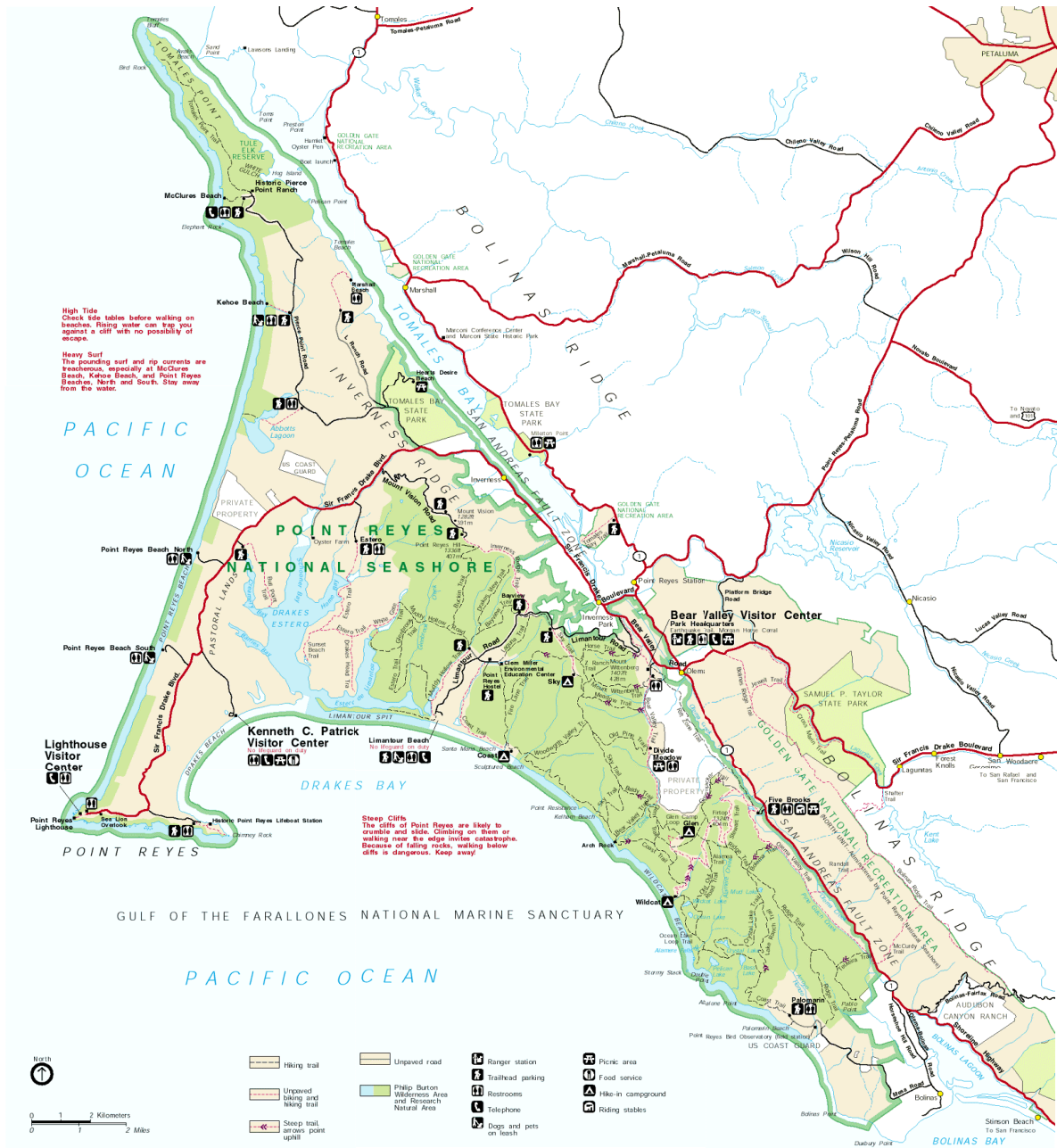
Point Reyes National Seashore has three major activity areas and a host of smaller activity areas. The three major areas are a significant distance into the Park from the entrance station/visitor center, making the distribution of visitors within the Park an important and difficult issue. Limantour Beach is 9.1 miles (17.5 minutes drive time) from the Bear Valley Visitor Center. The Lighthouse and Chimney Rock are at the end of a peninsula nearly 21 miles (39.0 minutes drive time) from the Bear Valley Visitor Center. McClures Beach and several nearby trailheads are 17.1 miles (31.0 minutes drive time) from the Bear Valley Visitor Center.

The three major sites are on independent spoke roads that emanate from the visitor center and there are no circulating connector roads between them. To see any two of the three sites during a single visit and make it back to the Park entrance would require an in-park trip between 35.3 and 60.8 miles (between one hour, six minutes to one hour, 53 minutes drive time).

Annual visitation at Point Reyes National Seashore has fluctuated over the last 10 years without a discernible trend up or down. Visitation has been between 2.1 and 2.6 million visitors per year since 1987. Visitation in 1997 was 2.53 million. November through February is the low visitation period of the year. May and August have the highest visitation.

Overall, the peak month is 32 percent higher in visitation than the average month and the off-season low is 40 percent lower in visitation than the average month. Park staff report the peak days of the month are sunny weekend afternoons. The biggest weekend is President's Weekend (the second weekend in February). Spring attracts crowds for whale watching.

Figure 1.



The eastern edge of Point Reyes National Seashore, between Olema and Inverness, and particularly around the Bear Valley Visitor Center, has the most developed character in the Park. Between Olema and Inverness, the Park boundary is intermixed with private uses including ranches, hotels, and stores.

Although no major increase in development in this area is anticipated, any significant increase in heavy vehicles, such as tour buses or RVs, would limit the capacity of the road

in this section (Sir Francis Drake Highway). The road is used several times daily by large feed, hay, and milk trucks serving the dairy farms west of Inverness.

In the short term, the Park's ability to accommodate more visitors will be limited by the supply of parking unless more parking can be created and/or alternate distribution systems like the peninsula shuttle can be implemented on a wider basis.

In the long term, the Park's ability to accommodate more visitors will be limited by physical and ecological constraints in specific activity areas. Whether the long-term constraints will remain limited to selected activity areas or whether overall park capacity will also become a long-term issue can only be determined through the General Management Plan process, including a more detailed environmental assessment of natural/cultural resource constraints and, where those constraints are not the limiting factor, a more detailed civil engineering evaluation of the physical constraints.

The main issues linking recreation and transportation together have to do with cost, access, and natural/cultural resource protection. The extent to which access and transportation can be controlled or managed, resource protection can be increased. Access and transportation controls/management often have the indirect impact of increasing costs and decreasing the ability of the public to enjoy the resources that attracted them to the Park in the first place.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The current operational strategy involves closing off Sir Francis Drake Highway to visitor traffic at 9:00 a.m. on sunny weekends and holidays during the winter and spring. Signs are placed south of the North Beach turnoff and at the Drakes Beach Road intersection, informing drivers of the road closure and the mandatory shuttle, respectively. Three buses, with a fourth arriving at noon, provide service nominally every 20 minutes from the Drakes Beach parking area to the Lighthouse and Chimney Rock.

The one-way bus travel time from Drakes Beach to the Lighthouse is 19 minutes. It takes the buses an additional nine minutes to unload, turn around and travel to Chimney Rock. The bus pauses several minutes at Chimney Rock. The return trip to Drakes Beach then takes 17 minutes. The approximate total time round trip is 50 minutes. The approximate total round-trip distance is 14.8 miles. The computed average travel speed, including stops, is 17.75 mph.

During the December 1997 through March 1998 operating season, the total operating costs were \$26,000. Approximately 6,500 people used the shuttle system during that time. Fare recovery, after discounting for cancellation fees, was about 70 percent of operating costs.

The round-trip fare has been increased from \$2.50 in the 1997/1998 season to \$3.50 in the 1999/2000 season. Pt. Reyes NS also plans to enter into a three-year contract beginning with the 1999/2000 season.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

The top three transportation issues or problems as identified by site staff are:

1. Parking constraints;
2. Operational and cost issues the shuttle bus system within the Park; and
3. Barriers to the use of Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) to get to/from the Park.

These issues were summarized in the 1999 report as follows:

- The Park's ability to accommodate more visitors will, be limited by the supply of parking unless more parking can be built and/or alternate distribution systems, like the peninsula shuttle, can be implemented on a wider basis.
- Anecdotal information about the existing parking areas suggests there may be physical/topological and carrying capacity issues that will limit the construction of additional parking and may place limits on total person-visits to portions of the Park.
- For the internal park shuttle system to be viable on a long-term basis, additional investments in visitor facilities would be required. Operational and funding issues also create practical difficulties for the system in the short term.
- Additional stops could be added to the existing shuttle route to increase visitor access.
- There are many barriers that make it unattractive for most visitors to consider using public transit to reach the Park from the San Francisco Bay Area and thereby reduce parking pressures at the Seashore.

The most recent transportation plans prepared for this site was the 1998-1999 Point Reyes Transportation Study. The Transportation Study recommended the following transportation improvements or projects in the *short term*:

- Additional lane striping and signage to improve traffic flow into and out of parking areas (\$6,500);
- Placement of bumper blocks in parking areas and to better separate pedestrian areas from parking (\$6,000);
- Require scheduled departure times for the shuttle system to keep wait times to no more than 20 minutes (no cost increase);
- Make end-of-day route modifications to the shuttle to better handle end-of-day passenger demand issues;

- Explore five suggested strategies to make the shuttle service more financially sustainable; and
- Place additional traffic counters to provide more information for long-term decision-making.

The Transportation Study recommended the following transportation improvements or projects in the *long term*:

- Conduct further site-specific planning over time for long term road improvements such as climbing lanes, shoulders, and lane widenings;
- Complete the General Management Plan update to provide a policy framework for long-term capital improvements and to address natural, cultural, and physical constraints of potential alternatives;
- Reach a more satisfactory institutional/management agreement with Marin County for long-term capital improvements and short-term maintenance;
- Consistent with the findings of the GMP update, expand parking in selected areas; and
- As appropriate to the GMP update, expand the shuttle bus system for more comprehensive service, including service quality, service hours, and geographic coverage.

Two alternatives were considered in the Transportation Study, pending the update of the GMP and additional data collection.

- Modify the existing Drakes Beach Shuttle vis-à-vis parking improvements.

As the Drakes Beach parking area reaches its capacity under the current shuttle system, and assuming that the Lighthouse/Chimney Rock activity area has not reached its social carrying capacity, additional parking and/or additional intercept lots would need to be provided.

The following are options for serving this demand:

1. Serve Drakes Beach as the primary intercept lot, and then serve South Beach as the overflow intercept lot; and
2. Construct a new intercept parking lot along Sir Francis Drake near the intersection of Drakes Beach Road.

Under either alternative, if the shuttle system became a permanent operation, some interpretation along the route could be provided by a tape or by the driver. The challenging nature of the road probably requires the full attention of the driver. Some sort of a tape-oriented interpretation could be very attractive to visitors.

- Create a park-wide bus shuttle system.

In order to address the possibility that transit service may need to be expanded beyond the Lighthouse/Chimney Rock activity area and that there could be a need to connect the Bear Valley Visitor Center with the Park’s “interior” shuttles, a park-wide shuttle was considered. The park-wide shuttle was assumed to serve the entire length of the following roads (one-way mileage in parentheses): Limantour Road (9.1), Sir Francis Drake (19.7), Drakes Beach Road (1.5), Lighthouse Road (1.1), Lifeboat Station Road (1.0), and Pierce Point Road (9.4). The total round-trip system mileage amounts to 83.6 miles. Based upon the existing shuttle system operating speed of 17.75 mph, it would take 4.70 hours to serve the entire park with one vehicle. Table 1 below identifies the minimum number of vehicles it would take to provide service with wait times of no more than 30 minutes and 20 minutes respectively.

The number of vehicles required for a fully operational park-wide shuttle could be higher. Additional analysis of this concept would be necessary to more accurately determine the number of buses based upon the varying demand levels across the Park, the peaking characteristics of the demand, and specific route configurations.

**Table 1. Park-Wide Shuttle Vehicle Requirements**

<b>Service Frequency (Maximum Wait Time)</b>	<b>Minimum Number of Vehicles Required</b>
30 minutes	10 in operation, 1-2 backup
20 minutes	15 in operation, 2-3 backup

Source: BRW Inc.

At the existing cost of \$67.74 per operating hour, 10 vehicles operating eight hours per day would cost \$5,420 per day, and 15 vehicles would cost \$8,130 per day. Costs would rise for all other destinations added such as North Beach, South Beach, Mt. Vision Road, Tomales Bay State Park, etc. Reservations, permitting, or other measures would be required to provide auto access to those locations not served by the park-wide shuttle. Given that the existing system is operating below the break-even point with three vehicles, significant financial planning would need to take place before a park-wide shuttle could be implemented successfully.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Point Reyes National Seashore has three major activity areas and a host of smaller activity areas. The three major areas are a significant distance into the Park from the entrance station/visitor center, making the distribution of visitors within the Park an important and difficult issue. The three major sites are on independent spoke roads that emanate from

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The Park's ability to accommodate more visitors may be limited by the supply of parking unless more parking can be built and/or alternate distribution systems, like the peninsula shuttle, can be implemented on a wider basis. There are operational and cost issues about the shuttle bus system within the Park. There are also many barriers to the use of ATS to get visitors to and from the Park.

Potential ATS needs have been identified for this site as follows:

- Modifying the existing Drakes Beach Shuttle vis-à-vis parking improvements; and
- Creating a park-wide bus shuttle system.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

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